



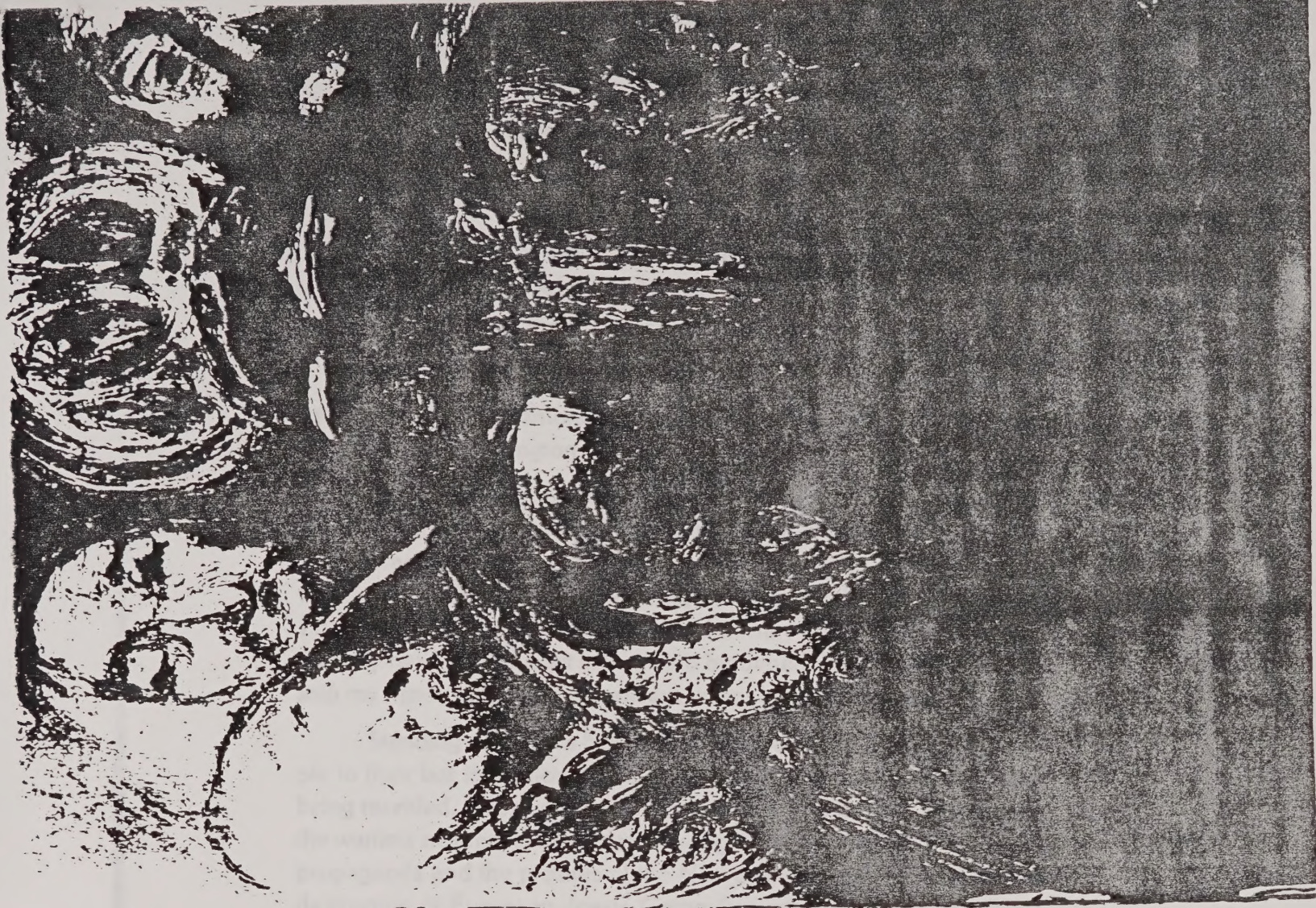
ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims
Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

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CHAPTER ONE



Please exercise equal respect in the treatment of this publication
as you would a holy prayer book.

chapter one

REFLECTIONS ON THE DEDICATION OF THE
HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

by Sam Rosenberg

This was a very memorable event for me, to be present this past April 18-22 in Washington.

During the various ceremonies at the Capitol Rotunda and Arlington National Cemetery, I found myself in a different world. The preview and visits to the Museum evoked memories that I desired to forget--the gruesome end of my family, relatives and friends, of the world I had known. Circumstances of their demise evoked in me anger and pity. My heart and soul felt injured and burdened. Many questions came into my mind, but I knew the answers were beyond my understanding.

Standing next to the boxcar that transported so many of our people to their last inhalation, while they were made to believe they were being resettled. Heaps of shoes, from infants to adult sizes. Re-reading the wartime newspaper headlines, viewing the films of the Nazi "Sturmer" propaganda and the pictures of the Nazi collaborators who helped the destruction of European Jewry. Going through the exhibits and floors that portrayed the scope of the entire tragedy.

When I entered the Remembrance Hall, noting the flickering bluish flame of the Eternal Light, I had a feeling of awe and holiness. At the same time the remembrance of the horrors of the past reminded me of the mothers holding their infants in their arms, children holding on to their parents, and the adults calling out to G-d: "Habeit Min Hashamaim Ureyh." (Look down from heaven and see).

Today, on Yom Kippur, we repeat in our prayers, "Remember our covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," but "Man must be satisfied that he will never understand the ways of G-d." (Job 42-3).

On Thursday, April 22nd, the official memorial dedication took place. It was a dreary, cold, rainy day. While securing a seat several hours before the start of the ceremonies, I reflected.

I remembered that fateful Sunday of April 22, 1945--the last moments before my liberation. We marched for seven days in constant rain, in the German countryside. More than half of my fellow prisoners

lost their lives. On that journey, on April 18, I lost my sixteen-year-old brother, the last surviving member of my family. The only available food was raw potatoes.

Under heavy SS guard, we settled on the outskirts of Neuburg v. Wald (Bavaria). We landed in a farm. Many expired, barely whispering a word. Some were too weak to stand up or walk. The sound of artillery fire became louder by the hour. In the dark hours of that night the SS loaded the dead and the weak on a farmer's diesel truck. After several trips into the woods, they shot them.

In the early morning hours of April 23rd, the guards suddenly disappeared, and the tanks of the Third U.S. Army liberated us. At that moment I witnessed the ruins of the Third Reich. The prisoners of war surrendered, bare-headed, kneeling, their uniforms unbuttoned, their epaulets and rank insignia torn off.

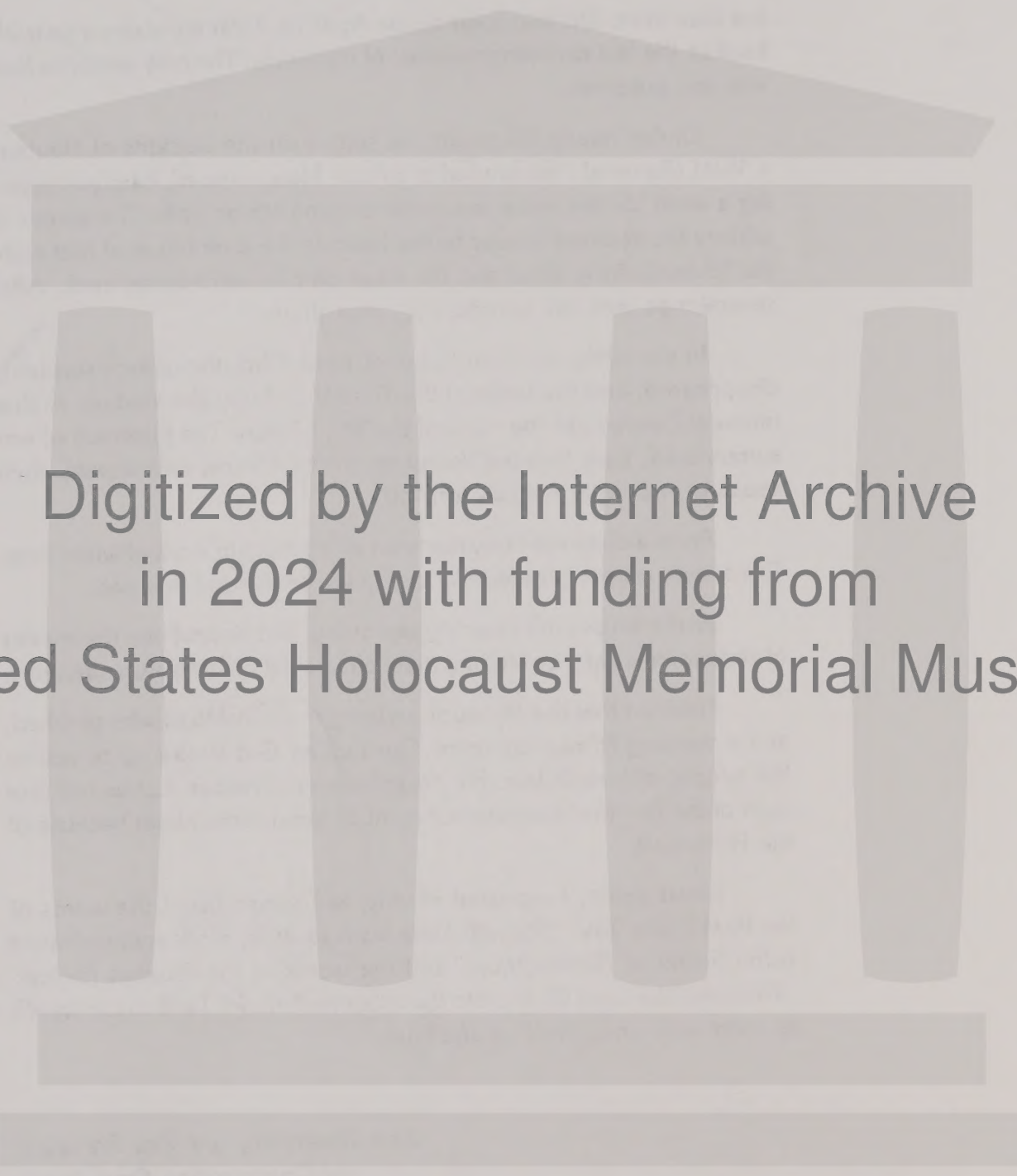
From a distance I saw the town of Neuburg in a sea of white flags. The town's mayor greeted the occupiers with bread and salt.

At the museum's opening ceremony, Ted Koppel was the master of ceremonies, acknowledging that he is a child of Holocaust survivors.

I realized that the Museum is a living memorial to all who perished, and a warning to our enemies. Our hidden G-d shows up to rescue His people; although late, He nevertheless intervenes. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the establishment of Israel came about because of the Holocaust.

Never again, I repeated silently, as I remembered the words of the Baal Shem Tov: *"Forgetfulness leads to exile, while remembrance is the Secret of Redemption,"* and the words of the Prophet Ezekiel: *"Thus said the Lord G-d--unto these bones, behold, I will cause breath to enter unto you. And ye shall live."*

*Sam Rosenberg is a Vice President
of Congregation Ezras Israel.*



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MY WILL TO SURVIVE

by Sam Rosenberg

The Wannsee Conference in January, 1942 was of the highest importance, called by the Germans to coordinate and implement the "Final Solution." No fewer than eight of the fifteen participants held Ph D's. One hundred thousand from various elite German forces were put into service for the destruction of Jewry.

Beyond December 31, 1942, few Jews were still living outside the concentration camps. Because of the war effort, the demand for forced labor intensified. I was the oldest of three siblings and did not have the heart to leave the parents behind. For Jews in the Ghetto, life in 1942 became unbearable. Many of my peers volunteered to go into the camps. Some were summoned by the "Judenrat" into the work force. My parents pleaded with us to save our lives. Imagine, to part with parents, knowing that you will never see them again.

Sunday at dusk, on October 4, 1942, my brother, Israel David, age 13, and I sneaked out from the Ghetto in Staszow. With small knapsacks and meager belongings we hurried past the main Catholic church on the road leading to the Golejow Forest. The feeling of sadness overcame me. A birth document with the christening date of a deceased Pole I decided to leave behind. Our group consisted of twelve people. Two were cousins, the rest were escapees from the town of Mielec. In March, 1942, the entire Jewish population of Mielec, about 1,200, was herded into the cemetery and killed. A few young men escaped and found their way into a labor camp nearby at the road construction company of Bäumer and Lesh of Stuttgart, Germany. We aimed to reach this camp.

We marched through this heavily wooded forest until we reached the village of Turusk, situated on the banks of the Vistula. The time was 2:30 A.M. In our group was my cousin, Avrum Rotenberg, whose father was born in this village; his grandfather was the owner of the flour mill. A villager, Schlosser, a native ethnic German, arranged for a barge for us to cross the Vistula. At that moment I gathered courage and determination. My role was left to destiny and providence. Violators caught leaving the Ghetto were shot on the spot.

As we crossed, not a word was spoken, not a match lit. We walked in the darkness on a single-lane primitive farm road for about one hour. We stopped at a barn where we drank herbal mint tea. The farm couple was scared, but co-operated.

From there we proceeded into the vicinity of Bäumer and Lesh camp. The families Presser and Freiberg were administering the 450 camp inmates. Suddenly, the "arbeitsleiter," (camp director) Kula, an ethnic German, appeared in the company of two German shepherds. He was partially drunk and used vulgar language, swinging his whip in our direction. As he whispered the word, "Jude," the dogs jumped, ready to attack us. After intervention and bribes we were admitted to register.

The camp area was fenced off with heavy barbed wire. Rumors circulated that the Germans had set fire to some of the barracks, with the Soviet prisoners inside. The day at camp started at 5:00 A.M., as we had to stay in line for a meager slice of bread and a cup of chicory. The bread I saved for lunch. Many times, most of the time, I was hungry, but held on in order to survive. At 6:00 A.M. the whistle called for the "appel platz" (roll call).

To work, we traveled in triangle construction wagons on tracks to the construction site. We were assigned to form a sand base for a six-lane highway linking up to the Soviet Union. We dynamited the roots of the removed trees to make way for the planned construction. The German engineer on the site, Kucera, made us work extremely hard. We returned to the barracks at about 5:00 P.M. to stay in line for a soup ration. On Sunday an extra ration of margarine was distributed.

Several days later my younger sister, Vita, (age 16) followed on the same route with several other women, to the nearby camp, called "Fisher." They drained marshes, which was very hard in this fall weather. The regional Gestapo chief, Zimmerman, inspected our camp several times a week. His presence brought fear and terror. A physician and camp inmate, with no infirmary facilities, had reported a case of high fever. Zimmerman called for the sick man, Keller, and escorted him into the nearby woods and shot him. Keller was about twenty and newly arrived with our group. It was for me a shocking experience.

By that time, in the closing days of 1942, all Jewish communities and ghettos ceased to exist. One thousand years of Jewish life in Poland

came to a tragic end. Residing in the camp in separate quarters were two men, Kaplan and Immergluck. They found favor with the local Gestapo chief, Zimmerman, who was a local ethnic German resident, with family roots going back generations before the war. Their wives and children had the same fate as all Jews. These two worked for the Gestapo, left camp in the morning and returned in the evening. Many times they gathered a minyan so they could recite Kaddish for their departed families. One day in November, 1942, the Gestapo chief and two S.S. officers arrived. While kneeling, Kaplan and Immergluck were searched by the officers. On one of them they found a fifty dollar bill. Escorted in a jeep, while pleading for their lives, they were shot. I presume that the two officers were supervising a group in charge of obliterating traces of German atrocities. After termination of their work the prisoners were killed. This was considered a "Reich Secret."

One day a ray of hope, a letter from my parents, arrived (by mail or messenger, I don't remember). I learned that several days before the mass deportation of Staszow, they escaped into the nearby forest and lived in a cave. The cold weather and lack of food were now their main concerns. The Poles and the Polish police were cooperating with the Gendarmerie in search of Jews. Many were flushed out and killed. In December, 1942, the S.S. announced the creation of a central ghetto in Sandomir. Safe passage was assured on all roads. Many flocked to this safe haven, including my parents. My sister, Vita, was smuggled out of camp Fisher to join the parents in Sandomir. On Sunday, January 10, 1943, the Jewish quarter in Sandomir was surrounded by the Straf Commando (Penalty Commando). On an extremely cold day, that morning, 800 dead were left on the market place, their bodies frozen to the ground. The rest went with a transport to Treblinka.

*Thus wail a people only that is lost, whose soul is dust and ashes,
and its heart a scorched desert. (H.N. Bialik)*

*For these things I weep, mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water.
(Lamentations 1-16)*

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G-D'S CHOSEN — IN SEARCH OF HIM

by Sam Rosenberg

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CHAPTER
3

In March of 1943 the Baumer and Lesh Road Construction Company was ordered closed. The Reich's plan for a six-lane highway to the Soviet Union was scrapped. The siege of Stalingrad and one-year offensive ended in retreat.

We were evacuated to the concentration camp in Mielec, in close proximity to the Messerschmidt Aviation Plant. A huge ornamental sign in front of the camp proclaimed, "Arbeit Macht Frei." This plant made the core bomber plane in the Nazi arsenal. By that time, all former Jewish communities in the big cities, villages and shtetlach were Judenrein.

The director of the camp was Joseph Schwamberger, a thirty-two year old Austrian born S.S. Obersturmfuhrer. Before this assignment he was in charge of liquidating Jewish life in this district.

Upon my arrival, I was assigned work in the aviation plant, on a two-shift schedule, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Our wake-up call was at 5 a.m. In a huge hall the size of the old Chicago Stadium, I was to assemble the wings of the bomber plane. Two inmates to a station, we had to fit the aluminum panels, drill holes to millimeter accuracy and rivet it all with an electric hammer. The noise was deafening. Mistakes had to be reported to the divisional German engineer -- too many mistakes were considered an act of sabotage. Inspection was very rigid.

Every morning we assembled for the "appel" (roll call), hungry, scared and apprehensive. We had to stand at military attention. The daily ritual was started at 6 a.m. by the Jewish Police Chief, Henry Friedman, with his brother at his side as his assistant.

Henry addressed us in Polish, barking orders while the Ukrainian S.S. stood by and Schwamberger came out of his office in a neatly pressed S.S. uniform. At the inspection he selected individuals to be punished with lashes by a Jewish policeman, while he made sure that the full measure of hardship was meted out. Many times he selected inmates from this place for execution at the nearby Berdichow Cemetery.

We marched out to work in divisional groups, four abreast, in strict

military order. My younger brother was not in my group, so before departing for the day, I made sure that he left the camp. At the gate we were accompanied by Ukrainian police in black uniforms. We called them "teutekopfe" (Dead Heads). They were illiterate, brutal and sadistic, and enjoyed kicking, beating and striking prisoners with their rifle butts. Production level was set by the German engineer, while the Jewish *arbeitsleiter* oversaw the work process. At lunchtime we stood in line for a watery soup. At day's end we formed a column and were ordered "Mutzen out" or on (caps off or on) and to sing. Before entering the gate, a head count was made again.

We lived in wooden barracks, equipped with two-tier bunk beds with meager coverings. My brother and I shared one bunk bed. At the end of the day we were happy to see each other. Together we mourned for our relatives, cousins, uncles, aunts and grandparents who perished in the transports to Treblinka. We were aware that our parents and sister were in the S.S.-proclaimed Judenstadt and had been transported to Treblinka. Many times I wondered why G-d's chosen people deserved this punishment, and why He chose Nazi Germany as his instrument for their demise. The evening meal consisted of a slice of bread and a ladle of soup.

The camp infirmary consisted of four beds with very poor sanitary conditions. An inmate, Dr. Birn, from Krakow, was in charge of this little dispensary. He was not a kind person. I don't wish to fault him; perhaps he had to follow the orders of Schwamberger.

In January, 1944, I came down with a very high fever and was admitted for a two-day stay in the infirmary. Lack of room forced me back to my room with fever. To remain in the barracks during working hours was life threatening. My brother helped me dress, laced my shoes and washed my face. In the lineup my legs were not steady and shook. I stood in the last row of the *appel*. Had the Obersturmführer noticed my looks he would have selected me to go to the Berdichow Cemetery.

Dr. Bitkower and her husband arrived at the camp in the beginning of 1944; she was camp physician and he was director in charge of clothes distribution. A large variety of clothes came from the Auschwitz Crematorium (a distance of about 60 miles). The arriving prisoner transports undressed before entering the showers and were told that their clothes and belongings would be given back. In reality this was the last half hour

of their lives before being poisoned with zyklon gas.

Adjoining the camp was a farm with functional farm buildings and quarters. Four camp inmates were assigned as caretakers, and to attend to the two white horses of the commandant. The farm was fenced all around with electric cables. In the middle of the night the four inmates let the horses out: they ran into the cables and were electrocuted. The four escaped while the cables were neutralized.

When Schwamberger learned the facts, he sounded an alarm at 2 a.m. and ordered the entire camp on their feet. We were given only a few minutes for the roll call. The S.S. organized a search for the escapees, with no results. We stood outdoors for several hours with little clothes on, expecting a reprisal. It came soon, as the S.S. selected ten inmates from those assembled. Six were executed and four were hanged. Panic, gloom and desperation overtook me. Finally, we marched out to work as usual. My brother and I were now planning to escape. We were planning to remain behind and hide in the factory over Sunday. After many weeks of scouting around, we learned that besides the alarm, they had guards and German shepherds protecting the premises.

On June 7, 1944 while at work, I found a German newspaper in the washroom, stating that the Allied forces were trying to establish a beachhead in Normandy, and were being repulsed by the Wehrmacht back into the Channel. With the German military defeat and retreat on the entire eastern front, the Soviet army now engaged in a heavy offensive drive to open the second front on the west.

The German number one priority now was to speed up the stream of Jewish victims from eighteen European countries, and to exterminate every living Jew. In July, 1944, the order came to have us tattooed with the initials K.L. (Konzentrations Lager). I distinctly remember waiting on that hot day for this procedure.

I feel it would be an injustice to my story if I did not tell you about Obersturmführer Schwamberger. He was a typical example of one who was responsible for the great Jewish tragedy. For many years after the war, I kept a dossier on him. He was arrested in 1945 by the American military police with a sack full of gold items. With the help of the Vatican, he escaped to Argentina. For forty-two years he lived under an assumed name. In 1987 he was traced by an anonymous bounty hunter to whom

the German government paid three hundred thousand dollars.

It took two years to extradite him to Germany and stand trial. Two prosecution and two defense lawyers traveled to Chicago and to many other cities and countries to gather testimony. I was a witness in this case. A panel of nine judges sat in Stuttgart, presiding over a trial that lasted over a year.

There were tens of thousands of pages of testimony. Eyewitnesses testified that he personally executed fifty Jews and assisted in the murder of three-thousand, five-hundred more. They saw him throw children into bonfires, and commit atrocities that are too cruel to describe here. In 1992 the panel of nine judges announced a verdict -- life imprisonment. (Germany does not have the death penalty).

The German losses on all fronts were huge, and their labor force was shrinking. The demand for weapons was critical. At the end of July, 1944, our camp was evacuated, taking only able-bodied camp inmates. We were pushed into freight cattle wagons, 70 to each wagon. Each man received a one-pound loaf of bread, which was to last for several days. Only one pail of water and one pail for our daily needs were furnished for each wagon. The guards pushed me and I was kicked in the groin several times.

Our transport reached Plaszow K.L. (a distance of about 60 miles). I saw transports arriving with Hungarian and Dutch Jews on the way to Auschwitz. They believed that they were being resettled. Their valuables, collected over many years, were confiscated. Many empty trains arrived and carried this wealth into Germany.

We stayed in Plaszow for two days. From there we were ordered to the Wieliczka Salt Mines. The Messerschmidt engineers made efforts to have us transported to Germany to continue our work in the aviation plant there. This would have kept them off the front lines and avoided their induction into the armed forces. During these few days in Plaszow, many of my comrades lost their lives by beatings and shootings. The turmoil felt like the end of the world for us.

Awake, why sleepest thou. O Lord cast not off forever. Wherefore hidest thou thy face and forgettest our affliction and our oppression.

Psalm 44-24

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

by Samuel Rosenberg

It was July, 1944. The Russian offensive had broken through German lines in central Europe. The Americans had established a large presence in France; Paris was liberated. There was a failed bomb plot on July 20, 1944 against Hitler by Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, chief of the *Abwehr* (The Armed Forces Intelligence). The Nazis and the military realized they were fighting a losing war, and that the end of the regime was only a matter of time.

We were evacuated from the Mielce K.L. (*Konzentrations Lager*) in the middle of July, 1944 arriving at the railroad tracks leading to Auschwitz. I saw the trains arriving from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania, their cattle cars loaded with Jewish men, women and children. They were on their final destination — the gas chambers. We were transferred for two days to the Wieliczka salt mines. The speed of the Nazi actions was now enormous because of their military setbacks on all fronts. All of these locations were within a 35 kilometer radius of Crakow, seat of the Governor of Poland, Hans Frank.

The SS were shooting during the morning *appel* (roll call). The reception was always severe. We were kicked and beaten. Inmates were hanging from the gallows. We were completely at their mercy. My brother and I went through the agony of life and death.

On the morning of July 27, 1944, a selection took place in our group. The able-bodied, young and skilled were given brand-new striped uniforms and caps to match. We marched to the train station, four abreast with locked arms, under heavy guard by SS and *Sicherheits Dienst* (Ukrainian-born ethnic Germans). These guard units had been mobile killing units in their native country. Their fingers remained on the triggers of their machine guns as German shepherds ran along both sides of the marching column.

At the station cattle cars were waiting. We were pushed in with rifle butts, seventy to a car. Each inmate was handed a one pound loaf of bread. One pail of drinking water and one pail to serve as a toilet were provided for each wagon. The heat in the car was unbearable; there were only two small openings, one on each side.

We traveled for many days through the German countryside, our destination unknown. Many times the train stopped for several hours, but we were permitted to go out only twice daily for a short period. During transit the shooting of prisoners came to a halt. We passed through some beautifully manicured farmland, with neatly painted white farm buildings and homes. Healthy-looking livestock grazed in the fields. The civilian population observed us with bewildered looks or no reaction at all. Their blank expressions gave me the impression that they felt that the Jews deserved this punishment.

I envied their peaceful life and their material well-being. The Tenth Commandment, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house," did not apply in the case of Nazi Germany. I thought of our rabbinical view of *s'char* (reward) and *v'onesh* (punishment) as I remembered my pious and ethical parents. I recalled my Bubbe reciting by heart in Yiddish at dusk every Saturday, "G-d of Abraham," and my Zayde testing my Talmudic skills on Saturday afternoons. The memory of past generations clung to me. Who shall be rewarded and who shall be punished? I questioned the rabbinic *Midath Harachmim*, G-d's virtue of forgiveness, and *Midath Hadin*, the formula that states we are judged by our sins and punished accordingly. While in Germany I observed the greeting, "Gruss G-tt" (Almighty G-d), was very commonly used. It bothered me that they used this sacred phrase even during the commission of criminal activities. At the same time, I saw some evidence of righteous punishment when our transport passed through areas that had sustained enormous damage to Nazi industrial capacity.

On August 4, 1944, the train stopped at the small station at Floss. We lined up in rigid military formation, outside the notorious Flossenbug concentration camp. This camp opened in 1938, located northeast of the Czech border, in a valley within a forest. The entrance gate was adorned with a huge ornamental iron sign, "*Arbeit Mach Frei*," a cynical slogan implying that freedom can be won by work. A stone plaque was inscribed with the word "*Schutzhaftlager*" (camp for protective custody). (The Nazi guard, Demjanjuk, was released by the Israel High Court because his defense proved that he was stationed elsewhere, as a guard in Flossenbug at the time).

As we entered we were counted by four SS officers. Inside the gate, on either side, stretched terraced rows of wooden barracks, twenty three in all. Each barrack had an A and a B wing. The grounds were immaculate; the scene gave the impression of a resort. Looking westward, I soon noticed smoke coming from the crematorium chimney. We were led to a

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large field and remained seated on the ground. In this valley setting, the days were very hot and the nights almost freezing. Several camp barbers clipped our hair in the middle of our heads, all the way back to the neck. The SS and an assistant called us for an examination. In line ahead of me, my brother was looked over and marked on the forehead in red with the number 3; he became prisoner #15971. I came next, marked with number 3, prisoner #15972.

The new arrivals were divided into three groups. Group number 1 was driven off to another designated camp location. Group number 2 remained, assigned to work in the stone quarry. There the work was very hard; the prisoners had to run up the steps with heavy loads of granite stones. Collapse due to malnutrition often occurred, followed by a tortuous death. Many of my comrades were to die this way within weeks. Number 3 was assigned to the Messerschmidt Werke, an aviation plant that manufactured German bomber attack planes. Next we were led to a bath house. We were ordered to leave our clothes and personal belongings outdoors. I had several family pictures; it was very painful to part with them. Our pubic and axillary hair was shaved.

In the nude we marched to a large field. Here used, clean civilian clothes were issued, most likely taken from the murdered victims of the occupied territories. The pants had white stripes painted down both sides, on the jackets K.L. was written on the back and front in white paint. On the left side mine bore a yellow triangle with the number 15972. To distinguish their offenses, all camp prisoners were marked with colored triangles: yellow for Jews, red for political prisoners, green for criminals and black for homosexuals.

Until our arrival, the camp population was comprised of gentiles from eighteen European countries, many German nationals. The latter were given easy jobs as administrative functionaries, such as blockcapos (bosses) and food distribution personnel. During the nine months at the camp, I never saw a female. I now felt the loss of my individuality and became an outcast — a number. I tried to retain the soul within me. The daily beatings and many humiliations made me feel that I was in another world.

I was assigned to block three and my brother, Israel David, to block seven. The barracks had three-tier bunk beds. Flossenburg became a reception camp, with arrivals from occupied parts of Europe. The block capo was a German, with a green triangle (criminal) badge. He was tall, good-looking, tough and rude. He acted in a violent manner towards the

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Jews, in accordance with SS rules. At the morning *appel* he predicted that the Jews would die soon. When I was assigned to sleep on a third-tier bunk bed I found two Russian prisoners there. They greeted me with a violent anti-Semitic diatribe, pushing me out of the bunk with force.

I slept on the floor in my clothes until we were awakened at 4:00 a.m. A cold shower followed, then we lined up for a cup of unsweetened herbal tea. Roll call was at 5:15 a.m. The guards used the morning and evening roll calls to torment and physically abuse Jewish prisoners.

My work day started at 6:00 a.m., when we began our march to the factory. Another head count was made at the gate. As we marched, we were ordered to sing German patriotic songs, and to practice *Mutzen* (caps on and off).

The aviation plant employed 800 inmates in two shifts of eleven hours each. I was assigned to work on the wings and fuselage of the ME 109 planes. My brother was not on the same shift, and it became harder to see one another. Two of my co-workers were Czechs. They were friendly and introduced me to my work but I was never offered anything from the food packages they received from home. We had a one hour lunch pause for a watery turnip soup. The division German engineer checked out my work the first day.

At 6:30 p.m. the roll call was repeated as we stood at attention. Many stood in wooden clogs or barefoot in five columns for hours on end. Supper consisted of a slice of bread, about six ounces, and a tenth of a cube of margarine and unsweetened tea. A one quart pot served me for all my meals. It was a long, hard day and hunger caused me headaches. Although hungry, I tried to save half of my bread ration for the following morning; it was often stolen from its hiding place in my jacket, which was used as a pillow. When I was later assigned to the night shift, we received only half of our soup ration; the inner circle of black marketers was selling the remainder. Lights out was at 9:00 p.m.

I learned that the camp was secured, day and night, by six large watch towers, armed with heavy machine guns. Sentries in pairs marched continuously through the camp; floodlights illuminated the entire camp. Any prisoner who ventured out of his barracks after 9:00 p.m. was shot. Many chose this form of death to find a release from the hard labor at the quarry. Almost every morning I witnessed some dead inmates laid out, to be delivered to the crematorium.

In December, 1944, I waited in line at the infirmary to see the camp

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doctor about a rash on my knee veins. He looked at it without comment. As I left the office, I discovered that my shoes has been stolen, so I returned to the block barefooted. I realized that there were two kinds of prisoners, the healthy and the dead.

In the beginning of 1945 I worked the night shift more often. We had alarm warnings almost every night, as the Allies stepped up their attacks. Often the camp had lights out several times in one night. When the sirens began to howl, panic struck the prisoners.

Torture in a special jail was used for slight offenses. For those condemned to death by public hanging, the executed remained on the gallows for twenty four hours. One execution remains in my memory. It was Christmas Eve, 1944. In a huge courtyard all available prisoners were assembled in a circle. I was, unfortunately, in the first row. Scared and worried, I held my soul in my hand. I was thankful that my brother was on a work shift. Two SS guards accompanied two prisoners to the gallows. They wore only pants. I remained in a daze for days afterwards.

In the last months before the liberation the execution squads were very active. Six new gallow hooks were installed, and a firing wall erected. Many of those executed were never prisoners in Flossenburg, but were brought there to be murdered. Seven of the participants with Admiral Wilhelm Canaris in the July 20, 1944 plot against Hitler were executed between March 9 and 12, as was the former Austrian chancellor Dr. Kurt Schuschnigg and his wife and daughter. In the last two weeks before the liberation, the dead were stacked close to the crematorium, doused with fuel and set on fire.

The German historian, Peter Heigl, has published a 200-page historical account on this camp. I befriended him in 1988 when he visited Chicago. In 1995 we met again. He is young, articulate and well aware of the sins committed by his generation's fathers and grandfathers. He also writes textbooks for the German school system. He researched the Holocaust (Shoa) tragedy. We shared information and he used my name in some of his writings.

By the beginning of April, 1945 rations became smaller and bread was no longer distributed. The only available food was raw potatoes and wheat kernels. Rifles and ammunition were now issued to all German prisoners. I felt that a break was near. On the morning of April 16, 1945, at 4:30 a.m. the loudspeakers blasted "*Alle Juden zum todt marchieren*" (all Jews were to march to their deaths). That morning I told my brother that we needed determination and the intercession of Providence.

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*Now flee, O son of man, forever flee,
And hide thee in the desert and go mad.
There send thy soul into a thousand pieces
And fling thy heart to all wild dogs for food.
The burning stones shall hiss beneath thy tears
And stormy winds shall swallow up thy cry!*

*(Chaim Nachman Bialik, Hebrew Poet Laureate,
after the pogrom in Kishinev, 1905)*

NEUNBERG...Free at Last

by Sam Rosenberg

At dawn, Monday, April 16, 1945, at the Flossenbürg concentration camp, the public address system repeatedly announced that all Jewish inmates should assemble in front of their barracks. We were ordered to form two lines. The German capo (boss), himself a prisoner with a green triangle on his left breast identifying him as a criminal, used vulgar language and pointed skyward. He was trying to tell us that we were the last of the Jews and that soon we would be in heaven.

Out of over twenty thousand prisoners, eighteen hundred were Jewish. In the last months, Flossenbürg became a reception center for prisoners from the already evacuated camps in the occupied territories, and from Eastern Germany.

We headed towards the *Appel Platz* (place of assembly) in several groups. A large number of SS officers and troops milled about. We stood at attention for an hour, and were then told that the orders of Heinrich Himmler were to march the Jews to their death. The tired and exhausted were to be shot in the heart, but not in the head. The dead were to lay along the road as they fell, awaiting disposition by the local communities along the way.

We marched four abreast under heavy guard. At the camp gate we were counted. Our group consisted of about 500 prisoners. My younger brother marched several rows in front of me, and I maintained a watchful eye so as not to lose sight of him. Our destination was unclear, and the only thing we knew was that the SS had instructions not to let any living Jews fall into the hands of the advancing Allied armies.

As we entered the town, having left the camp, not a citizen was visible. The town, although a tourist attraction with beautiful waterfalls, seemed deserted. We were several kilometers from the Czech border and in the center of Europe. The forests and the mountainous scenery were beautiful. We passed castles built in the twelfth century.

At eight a.m. on Monday morning we reached the railway station at Floss and boarded a waiting freight train. Those prisoners under the

age of sixteen were assigned to the open car at the front of the train; my brother boarded this wagon. I was several cars behind in a covered freight car. The train began moving slowly. After several uncomfortable hours, the transport was attacked by Allied planes which by now dominated the European skies. The machine guns killed many, predominantly those in the open car; others were wounded. The dead were unloaded and left at the side of the track; the wounded were shot by the SS, efficiently, precisely and coldly. It was as if they were swatting a fly.

After regrouping, we reboarded the train. My brother was able to rejoin me for the remainder of the day and night. The next morning, April 17, we temporarily left the train. We marched to a farm, passing forlorn, exhausted Jews, like us being marched to their deaths. The obvious tragedy was that the end of the war was so near and yet so many of us would not survive the next several days and yet see freedom. We received water from a well and a raw potato as our day's meal, and then reboarded the train.

On the morning of April 19, while our train was sitting motionless on a siding, I stretched out in the now half-empty train wagon. To my left lay my brother. Another Allied air attack began. A shell hit my brother in the head, killing him instantly and covering me with his blood and brain. Fragments from that same shell wounded me in the left elbow. Friends bandaged my injury and helped me cover it so as to hide it from the SS, for to reveal it was to be shot. One hundred and forty dead were taken off the train and taken to the Catholic cemetery at the nearby town of Schwarzenfeld (Bavaria) for burial.

The tragic loss of my brother, the last surviving member of what had been my large family, under such extraordinary circumstances and so close to the end of the war, was intolerable to me. I was more than devastated.

We now left the train for good and began another march. We rested occasionally in open fields, and slept that night in a farmer's barn. The weather became cold and rainy. On Friday, April 20, a warm spring rain fell as we marched by a convent; the nuns looked out their windows and dropped loaves of bread to us. This was the first food we had seen in two days. The SS was outraged and fired shots at the nuns in the second floor windows, to chase them away; they disappeared from sight.

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We found shelter from the rain in a forest. Hungry, cold, wet and in pain from my physical and emotional wounds, I prayed for my own death. I cried without tears. I thought of other Jewish historical sufferings... Job, Nebuchadnezzar and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Jewish captives carried off in chains to slavery. I thought of King Zedekiah, whose family was slaughtered in front of him, who was then blinded and led off to captivity. I recalled the Yom Kippur Musaf service "Avodah" of the Ten Martyrs: Rabbi Chananya Ben Teradyon was brought from his study hall by the Romans, burned while water was placed on him with sponges to slow the flames and magnify the agony. I prayed for my own redemption through death.

Later that day, Saturday, the sun came out. My clothes began to dry. A horse and wagon from a nearby town appeared out of nowhere and brought a load of broiled red potatoes. Two women in their thirties, from a nearby town, dressed in ankle-length leather coats asked if they could distribute the food to the starving prisoners. A single line was formed; any prisoner who left the line or asked for an additional potato was shot in the stomach. Several screams were heard. I particularly remember one in Hungarian. Those shot were shot again to finish them off.

By now the sound of artillery could be heard in the distance. The sound became progressively louder as we and the front line of the Allies approached each other. On Sunday, April 22, we were permitted into a barn on the outskirts of Neunburg, close to a forest. The farm had some adjoining outbuildings, livestock, and a house. Most of us lay on the straw-covered cement floor. I was very weak and so were my comrades. When I spoke to the one next to me he barely responded. Another asked me for water, but when I returned with it he was dead. Many lay there with eyes closed... I thought that they were asleep, but alas they were dead. The artillery sounded closer yet. The SS loaded the farmer's diesel truck with prisoners, driving them to the nearby woods for execution. That night several trips with that vehicle were made.

On Monday morning, I awoke to find very few prisoners in the barn. I went outside. Not a single SS member was there. They had fled in the night, wearing torn rags taken from the dead prisoners and leaving their uniforms behind. Very few of my fellow prisoners that had left the Flossenburg camp seven days before remained alive.

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Approaching us was a great green armada consisting of vehicles of the American third army. There were huge tanks, giant artillery pieces, ambulances, portable kitchens and military police. Overhead, shielding the troops below, were military close-air support. We sat on the edge of the road and waved to the troops as they passed. They jubilantly waved in return. Soldiers in a passing vehicle dropped chocolate and cigarettes, as well as two priceless dinner rations. It was the first time in many days that I had eaten real food. The town of Neunburg, in the distance, displayed a sea of white flags from every window and rooftop. No shots were fired. The military police directed traffic, and the town mayor greeted the soldiers with bread and salt.

In a nearby field Nazi officers and high ranking civilians were sitting on the ground, heads bare, field jackets unbuttoned, epaulets torn, with ranks and insignia removed. Only a small contingent of MPs supervised this group. Pronouncements of the authority of the military governor for the region were made.

Now my thoughts returned to my family and our losses. I was a stranger in a strange country, speaking a language that was foreign, with no one to call my own, and no resources to fall back upon. I walked in the direction of the town, but my feet wouldn't carry me. After resting I tried again, only to fall once more. I was forlorn, frustrated, in a cursed country, wearing filthy concentration camp rags with a number of them that I wished I could forget. A local farmer, noting my predicament, helped me into a wagon, and pulled me by hand to a newly established field hospital. The building was formerly a school and now was designated to treat casualties. It bordered the town cemetery and a Catholic convent of the Sisters of Mercy. Friendly nuns greeted me, washed and bandaged my wound and gave me clean underwear. I rested in a hospital bed. The nuns conducted services twice daily, at the foot of an altar adorned with fresh flowers. In the evening, they sang songs and said prayers, walking through the hospital sprinkling holy water. They then sent me to a more sophisticated clinic for *Roentgenography* (X-rays). I heard the physician reciting his diagnosis, that the left ulna was fractured and that a large metal shell fragment was lodged in my elbow. The heart was described as "*etwas verbreitet*" (somewhat enlarged). Upon my return to the field hospital my fever was very high and I developed diarrhea, in part from over-feeding. The fever, probably wound related, lasted ten days.

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I remember a young Jewish doctor, a former inmate named Rubinstein, from Krakow. He himself had been a patient at the hospital for a week. The physician daringly operated on the severely injured arm of a former prisoner, and when the man awakened from his anesthesia, he found his arm amputated to the shoulder. The young survivor was shocked and enraged, attacking the doctor, beating him about the face. The nuns were outraged.

The staff at the hospital finally felt that I was strong enough to undergo an operation to remove the large piece of shrapnel from my left elbow. It had been responsible for my infection and high fever. When I awakened from the anesthesia, they handed me the large pieces of shell fragments which I have kept to this day. The markings on the metal read "Fastenep M.S. Czecho Slovok KOA-1-Noor Pat."

An interesting aside occurred recently. When making copies of a recent Holocaust article that I had written for the Memorial Book, a woman at the printing shop mentioned to me that she had a copy of a paper that had been written by John Manscher. It was entitled, "None of You Raised Your Voice" and was funded by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. I didn't review this material until several months ago, and when I did, I found some photos taken by US Army journalist Pat Coffey. The photos received little attention in the waning days of the war, and were rediscovered in boxes in his Denver garage after his death in 1979. His daughters gave this archive to Carolyn Patton; she published some of this work in the "New Mexican" with Richard McCord. The photographs were of 161 Jewish bodies found in a field outside of Neunburg. He chronicled the events of the next days.

The American military governor of Neunberg wanted to impress upon the Germans that the world and America would hold them responsible for the atrocities committed by their countrymen. He ordered that Sunday, April 29, all German civilians, men, women and children assemble in the town square. They were marched to the forest where the bodies of the Jews were laid out on the grassy hill. Some 700 Germans carried freshly made pine caskets. These were laid down next to the corpses of Hungarian, Polish, Czech, Romanian and Yugoslavian Jews, many of whom had been in the same transport as I. The caskets were filled and the German civilian pallbearers, many of them women, carried the open coffins to and through the town. One of Coffey's photographs shows an open coffin, the mouth of the corpse

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twisted in a sardonic grin, seemingly nodding at the German woman carrying it. The procession continued for five shameful hours.

I had watched much of this from my hospital window facing the cemetery. I saw the open caskets lined up alongside the recent graves of German soldiers and SS. There was brilliant sunlight and a beautiful manicured landscape. The loudspeaker announced that those assembled were to look upon this gruesome evidence of the barbarity of the German people, resulting in the deaths of these innocents. Tears filled my eyes when I recalled my brother, who was buried in Schwarzenfeld, twenty kilometers away. A priest, pastor and rabbi prayed, and a compatriot of the dead spoke, his voice breaking. "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes." I cried for those who had marched and died along side me. I cried for the loss of my entire family, parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins. I felt guilt at having survived.

Coffey wrote: "...you conspired to tear these wretched dead from their homes and families, from their wives and children, sons and daughters from their parents, and others dear to them. You conspired to transport them from afar to work as your slaves in your underground munitions factories, your aviation plants, environmentally deadly Zyklon plants, in your homes and farms. None of you raised your voice in protest, content to profit by their blood and sweat in supporting the criminal activities of Hitler's grand idea of enslaving all of Europe."

Having lost so much, my dignity, my individuality and all of my family, I believe that we should never surrender to despair. A spark was always lit within me. I was justified. The Thousand Year Reich was no more. Its armed forces, concentration camps and leaders were no more. Its cities were bombed and devastated. Many of its leaders were jailed and punished.

Thus said the L-rd G-d: Come from the four winds, O breath and breathe upon those slain that they may live... Ezekiel: 37-5

When thou passeth through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire you shall not be burned, neither shall the flames kindle upon you... Isaiah: 43-2

Although I was liberated by forces of the U.S. Third Army on April 23, 1945, fierce battles continued to rage in many places. The strongest resistance was around Berlin. The Red Army had the city surrounded and after a bitter fight and thousands of casualties, managed to occupy the capital city. The Third Reich forces were instructed that no Jews should survive and they were determined to see this task to completion.

My liberation from the Flossenbug concentration camp was very dramatic; the last memory I have of the camp occurred on Sunday, April 29, when American troops found 161 Jewish prisoners executed in the woods outside Neuburg. I watched the funeral procession from my hospital window. That scene was sheer horror.

Years later, I read a nine-page-documentary booklet that was shown at the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Flossenbug that represented these horrors. On one of the pages, I found a description of how former French Prime Minister Leon Blum and his wife spent their time in this monstrous camp. Special prisoners were brought in from Buchenwald and executed daily in the prison yard or the bunkers. Other prominent individuals held or executed there included downed Allied pilots, participants in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the plotters in the foiled attempt on Hitler's life on July 20, 1944. At an ecumenical service in April, 1945, it was said, "*Das ganze Ort atmet Leiden un Tod,*" (the whole place breathed pain and death). In the book of Habakuk, the prophet calls out "...For the stones shall cry out of the wall." The atrocities of this evil Reich continued until their final surrender in May of 1945.

I recuperated at hospital 216A. This hospital was administered by Catholic nuns wearing habits all the time. Their service and dedication to the welfare of a multitude of former prisoners was superb. Food was rationed and in short supply, but we received an appropriate diet. They erected an altar adorned with beautiful

spring flowers and Catholic religious symbols in the large hospital auditorium (a former school gymnasium). Morning and evening services were conducted in a kneeling position with songs and prayers, at the end of which holy water was sprinkled.

Here I met many prisoners from a variety of countries. They looked forward to return to their homelands and reunite with their families. In my case, I felt very much alone with nothing to fall back upon. My only possession was the hospital gown. As I recovered and all of the excitement of liberation cooled off, the heavy burden of my sustained losses set in. As my physical well-being improved, I took walks in the adjoining gardens, and for the first time in many years I admired the trees, the bushes and the beautiful flowers. For several days I asked for permission to venture out in the little city. The stores were open, although little could be bought because of the scarcity of commodities, hoarding and the black market.

The character of what had been Nazi Germany was changing. Many leading Nazis in the town had been arrested. The town was administered by an American military governor, with the assistance of the local mayor. The military governor of the town was an American Jew, Captain Ira Myers. The American occupation forces issued Allied currency alongside the German mark. This caused inflation and a devaluation and led to barter as the means of dealing with life's necessities.

The former nation's leaders were arrested. The process of denazification was performed by specially installed judges. The twelve highest ranking Nazi ministers were arrested to stand trial in Nuremberg under the auspices of the Allied powers. On November 19, 1945 the defendants were presented with their indictments for war crimes. Most of them were found guilty and condemned to death after a trial that lasted over one year.

To reconstruct the devastated bombed and crippled country, U.S. Treasury Secretary, Henry Morgenthau, proposed that Germany shall be banned from rebuilding any of its industrial capacity. The new economy was to be based upon agriculture and some light industry.

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About June 1945 I was transferred to the nearby town of Schwandorf and placed in a former SS casino for recuperation. This place was administered by a Dr. J. Schindel as the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation) Medical Officer. He was also a prisoner newly liberated from a concentration camp. The town was close to the Czech border and a central point to which many Jews liberated in Eastern Europe congregated. They flocked to the Displaced Person (DP) camps to find temporary shelter until their emigration. It was like a transit camp from the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, Romania, etc. The ultimate destination was Feldafing or Landsburg in the American occupied zone. Many ethnic Germans were forced out from their long-established residences, in some cases of many centuries, and forced to resettle in Germany.

I met my cousin Avrum Rotenberg. He was with me at our escape from Staszow, just one month before the town's Jewish citizens were transported to Treblinka to meet their end. Avrum found work in a bicycle shop at a German firm in Schwandorf and arranged a used bicycle for my travel needs. The town had about 250 registered Jewish residents. Here I made many friends. From the *Wohnungsamt* (city housing office) I was assigned as a boarder in a German family. A Jewish committee and office were formed. We had daily and Sabbath services; I developed a close friendship with Rabbi Westreich from Krakow. He was the official religious authority, very talented and well-learned, progressive and down to earth.

I befriended Dr. Eichenholz and his wife, also from Krakow. He was a fatherly figure, an ardent Zionist from long before the war, and he took me under his wing. He became the President of the Zionist chapter and since he found me to be a person with the required Zionist background, he selected me as the chapter's secretary. We had an office and a telephone; it was the first time I had used a phone in my life. We had a public hall where we had general membership meetings, usually on Wednesdays, to whip up the members for a vote that would soon come, for a resolution encouraging the British to open the gates of Palestine to the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees. Also, loud voices were raised for Britain to give up her mandatory powers

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entrusted to her after the first World War. I was frequently the speaker at these meetings. Many of the liberated Jewish prisoners had no appreciation of the responsibilities for the historical aspirations and opportunities now facing us as Jewish survivors. Many of them were leftists disappointed with the Soviet Union, some were ultra-orthodox, many devastated by the disappointment that G-d had chosen the evil third Reich to destroy their families and their lives.

I had no visible means of support, and was dependent on my UNRRA rations. To depend on the public dole was demeaning to me. In the early fall of 1945, when I addressed one of the public meetings, I found my used, but precious, leather jacket stolen. I am certain that it found its way to the black market. Many of my friends dealt in black market goods...it was a way to survive.

Staszow, my home town, had been known for the mass production of shoes. My maternal great-grandfather, Israel David Fefferman, was the wholesaler of the town's shoe trade. Several hundred shoemaker families, none Jews, produced thousands of pairs of shoes per week in their homes with the help of family members. The upper portion of the shoes was produced by tradesmen who were mostly Jews. The Black River that ran through the town allowed the Jews to establish small tanneries and produce leather. The shoes that were produced were shipped, C.O.D. or on credit, to accounts in different cities. This family experience led me to open a business.

To establish a shoe store in Germany after the war required a permit from the Landsrat (government authority) and regional office of trade and commerce. After much delay and many excuses I received the permit from the Landsrat in Burglegensfeld. I rented a newly-remodeled location in the main business section of Schwandorf in March of 1946. I employed two experienced women and thus I had time for outside activities. From noon until 3:00 p.m. commercial activity ceased for lunch, during which time I visited the small American garrison stationed in the vicinity. The GIs often visited the town. I met a Jewish soldier from Chicago, Private Klein, who told me that he was a printer by trade. My mother's brother,

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Hyman Fefferman, lived in Chicago at 1344 N. Kedzie. Klein soon contacted him by military mail, and by return mail I received an affidavit, steamship ticket and a commitment for emigration to the U.S.A.

Hyman emigrated to the U.S.A. after the first World War, before I was born. He was being conscripted by the newly-formed Polish government to be inducted into the army. The borders of the newly established Polish state were not clearly defined yet. To avoid his entering military service, during which Jews were especially mistreated, my mother disguised him in female clothes and smuggled him out of the country by horse and wagon. Parting with her he said, "I will never forget what you did for me."

The only member of my family whose grave was known to me was my brother, Israel David, dead at age 16. On April 10, 1946 a tombstone was erected in the Catholic cemetery at Schwarzenfeld, where he had been killed the previous year on April 19th, four days before my liberation. Most members from the Schwandorf committee came to pay their respects. Rabbi Westreich eulogized him. Also, the regional director of UNRRA and other dignitaries came to the dedication. It was used as a demonstration of Nazi barbarism and genocide.

On April 6th and 7th, the first Zionist Convention of the *Shearith Hapelite* (Remnants of the Holocaust) was held in Lansberg. I was nominated as a delegate. The course of this event left me with a lasting impression of the unshaken Jewish spirit of survival. Addressing this meeting was David Ben-Gurion as the head of the *Vaad HaLeumi* (Jewish Agency) and at his side was Nathan Bistrisky, Hebrew writer and Histadrut leader. To my astonishment, a large number of blue and white flags were marched in to the podium. One of the flag bearers was my old friend, Sam Rosen, who still resides in Chicago. The theme of this gathering was crafted by Bistrisky who led the crowd in singing, "*Od lo nitka haschashet*" (the chain is not broken, and will continue for generations). Then Ben Gurion led the conference in the *Hatikva*. He then called upon the British to open the gates of Palestine for one hundred thousand stateless Jewish refugees, and to establish a Jewish homeland in

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Palestine. The crowd was very jubilant. I came from a Zionist family. My father was an active Mizrahi member, although my grandfathers were Chasidim. We, a people uprooted from its soil for two thousand years, were reorganizing from ashes. Never in human history had a nation that lost its language and dispersed into many countries, survived.

The road to Jewish statehood began. Unanimous resolutions were adopted at the convention. In order not to rely on others, the *Bricha* (escape organization) was created; hundreds of natives, former members of the Jewish Brigade, disguised themselves and smuggled Jewish refugees into Palestine. Unable to land, they were held in detention camps in Cyprus, such as Atlit, from August 1946 to May 1948. I now saw the beginning of the promised Jewish redemption. I was convinced that the seeds for an independent Jewish state were being planted. The remnant of the Jewish people was now determined not to rely on others, but on its own strength. The people of the covenant were entering the world arena, not only with spirit, but with force.

On a Sunday afternoon in July 1946, I attended a soccer match. My eyes settled on a newly-arrived refugee from Tarnopol in Soviet-occupied Ukraine. We had started a conversation when her sister, Regina, and four-year old daughter Goldie (now Gloria) joined us. Yetta told me about herself later that evening. She had been liberated by the Red Army in March, 1944, had lived in hiding with a Christian family for 18 months. During the daytime she assumed a standing position in a brick oven. At night she slept on a couch. The family had two young children; the younger child was not aware of Yetta's presence in the house. Now, since her arrival at Schwandorf, she found shelter in the home of a Jewish refugee family of six from her home town. We started to date and we both learned about each other's background. I found her to be industrious. Yetta, her sister and child had also received affidavits for the United States.

I invited them for an evening and presented Yetta with a hand-made silver pin; she lost it the same week. I replaced it, and she cherishes it to this day. I obtained a coupon for a pair of shoes

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from my store, but because of the poor quality she lost a heel as she left my apartment. Gloria contracted diptheria and had to be hospitalized in a special hospital for contagious diseases in Burglegenfeld. Rabbi Westreich introduced me to Rita Schlieven, the secretary of the American Consulate in Munich. Rita told me that papers for my visa were in order and soon I would be notified for a hearing. I corresponded with her and made arrangements to visit her in Munich with Yetta. Rita lived in a very nice apartment with her mother and five year old daughter. Through her efforts Yetta got a job as a receptionist and translator in the consular office.

We were now planning to emigrate to the U.S. but Yetta would have to leave her sister and niece behind if she left at this time. In an effort not to lose my turn in line, we decided that I should leave for the U.S. on my own and they would follow.

To depart, I went to the Bremerhaven staging area in October of 1946. A longshoremen's strike and a shortage of Liberty ships delayed the departure. A permit from the military authorities gave me a chance to return to Schwandorf and dispose of my shoe business in a legal manner. I gave it, as a gift, to my cousin, Avrum. He remained in Germany until he made aliyah to Palestine and joined the Palmach, the elite unit of the Israel Defense Force. He married and settled on a moshav near Hadera. On December 11, 1946, I finally departed Bremerhaven on the Liberty ship, *Marine Fletcher*. We arrived in New York on December 21. At the port I was greeted by a cousin, Aron Strauss, freshly demobilized from the army, who invited me to his parents' home.

On December 27th I departed for Chicago by train. At the station in Chicago I was greeted warmly by my Uncle Hyman, Aunt Lilly, and their children. My first job was as a salesman at a shoe store, where I worked a 54-hour week and was paid a salary of 26 dollars per week. Simultaneously, I enrolled in evening English classes at Lakeview High School. It was hard to do both.

Yetta, her sister and Gloria arrived in New York in April 1947. Soon I joined Yetta in New York, where she had family. We were

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married in the Boro Park apartment of her cousin, on the seventh floor, with a minyan present. The Kiddushin were performed by a relative of Yetta, Rabbi Shepsel Friedman. Relatives offered opportunities in New York which did not suit me, and we returned to Chicago to find work. Yetta started evening school at Schurz High School. In September 1947, my uncle offered me an interest-free loan of \$5000 to start a business. Hard work and Providence gave us the opportunity to begin new pages in our lives.

*Thus said the L-rd: A voice is heard in Ramah.
Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for
her children.*

*Thus said the L-rd: Refrain thy voice from weeping,
and thine eyes from tears. There is hope for thy
future.*

*Said the L-rd: They shall come back from the land
of the enemy and the children shall return to their
own border.*

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ODE—IN MEMORY OF STASZOW

by Samuel Rosenberg

Remembering the disappearing traces and the cradle of my youth, the Shtetl Staszow, Poland, I devote these pages to memorialize my school friends, who did not live to be liberated. I feel a moral obligation to testify to the tribulations and suffering of five thousand souls — men, women and children, whose unfinished lives ended at Treblinka. The memory of my parents and grandparents, my sister and brother, uncles, aunts and cousins left a need in my heart to never forget the agony and pain of their final days and hours. As I was only eighteen years old, much of the detail I will share with you comes from eyewitnesses and from historical records and books translated from Polish, Hebrew and Yiddish.

Our expulsion took place under the pretext of resettlement, not the first time Jews had been expelled from Staszow. In the year 1610, because of the false accusation that a Jew killed a Polish child, the Jewish residents of Staszow were expelled. In 1690 they returned in greater numbers and were permitted to have a synagogue, a cemetery and a Rabbinical Court. They entered business as small *Crafmanshaft* (skilled craftsmen) and as retailers.

The Reich forces occupied this town on Friday, September 8, 1939. A period of gradual tightening followed. They named a *Judenrat* (Jewish Committee) of eight and a presiding member, and made this body responsible for fulfilling Nazi demands and orders. The mayor of the town was a liberal person; he was released from his post and sent to Auschwitz. Nobody heard from him again. A lackey from the nearby town of Suchan became Mayor. He was an anti-Semitic fascist who directed the German authorities in forming laws that made their occupation easier. They demanded a 250,000 zloty contribution, a sizable sum for a poor community with only a few wealthy individuals.

In 1941, posters proclaimed that no Jews may leave town

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without a special permit. Anyone caught was to be shot on the spot. On several occasions, I traveled out of town on behalf of my family for business reasons. My father was afraid to make those trips.

An order by the Governor General, Hans Frank, to have the Jews hand over all their valuable fur pieces within a specified short period of time was next. Anyone found in possession of furs would be shot. Jewish businesses and factories had to operate under the supervision of a *Treuhandler* (a German ethnic) or a Pole.

The District Chief Commissioner was Jendreck Dressler, from the neighboring village of Szelic (of German heritage), a farming village of 700. Dressler would later come to his Jewish friend, Jacob Urish Kozochowitch, and demand leather goods. When Jacob responded that he had not been working for a long time and hadn't any, Dressler shot him.

SS Officer Von Maluski, a tyrant and sadist, was in charge of plundering Staszow. When he arrived for the first time, several trucks were filled with the merchandise he had stolen from several Jewish stores. Later he made a habit of plundering on market days, on Fridays, when the pillaged Jews were robbed of their meager possessions.

In the town of Mielec the Jewish population was liquidated in one day in March, 1942. The SS *Sondercommando* (military police) left over 3,000 Jews dead, and 3,000 were sent naked and barefoot to the frontier towns, some escaping the slaughter and finding shelter in Staszow. Three of them stayed in my grandmother's house.

A ghetto was established in June, 1942. Very restricted in their movements, many Jews were caught outside the ghetto and were shot on the spot.

The season of total extermination of the Jews in Poland had started in full force. The special units of the SS and their associates from Lithuania, Ukraine and Latvia went about their job systematically, deporting the Jews of Poland to their death. By September, 1942 most Jewish communities were *Judenrien* (rid of Jews). My brother and I escaped from Staszow on October 4, 1942.

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We just made it, as you will learn in the coming pages

A labor shortage in ammunition plants and various vital industries threatened the German war effort. Trucks arrived daily and searched the towns for young, able Jewish males. The road construction company, AMLER, had employed 250 Jews in a special camp in Staszow. These privileged ones were eager to work in order to save their lives. A manufacturing plant for the production of military uniforms was already in existence, and people hoped that work there would also save them. On September 27, several trucks arrived at the market place and many volunteered to work in the ammunition plant in Skarzsisk. One family of five, the Schreibhands, volunteered. Moshe, by profession a watchmaker and jeweler, served the needs of the SS and survived the war with his family intact.

Some of the volunteers were exposed to deadly chemicals that made them ill, and many died within a short period of time. Some survived while doing lighter assignments.

Yehiel Milgrom was the richest Jew in town, with a large hardware, building supplies and machinery business. A Polish Treuhandler had operated his store for two years. A car full of SS arrived at his business on Krakowski Street; all the good merchandise was loaded on trucks and taken away. Yehiel, half-naked, was tied to a car in public. In the evening the SS released him and placed him and his wife in a cell, where he was kept until the Black Saturday's final transport on November 8, 1942.

I realized that the days were near, when Staszow would suffer the same fate as all Jewish communities. Our parents insisted that my brother and I leave town. I kept a christening certificate of a dead Pole from the village of Kurozwenky hidden in our woodshed. On October 4, 1942 my brother, Israel David, and I sneaked out from the ghetto at dusk. With meager belongings in our knapsacks we made our way through side streets and hiked into the Golejow forest, where we met ten others. Two were cousins. It was painful to leave our parents behind. Our sister, Vita, left for Camp Fisher a couple of days later on the same route. We knew by this time, that in the surrounding town, aktionen (deportation) had taken place.

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In the meantime, Staszow had an influx of about 2,000 more illegals from the neighboring Jewish communities. They begged for work at the workshop that was established for the manufacture of military uniforms.

Saturday, November 7, was the day described as the Black Sabbath. People ran to relatives, friends and neighbors to bid them good bye. Weeping and wailing were heard from the houses. Electricity to the ghetto was cut off. From 5:00 p.m. the town was cut off and guarded by German, Ukrainian and Polish police. At 10:00 a.m. Obersturmfuhrer (high-ranking officer) Schild, in charge of the extermination in the Radom District, arrived. He demanded 10 kilos of butter, 10 kilos of pork, 10 kilos of rice and 5 kilos of tea for his 150 men, from the *Judenrate*, chaired by Efraim Singer. He banged on the table and announced in the name of Himmler that "the resettlement of Staszow Jews will take place tomorrow, Sunday, November 8 at 8:00 a.m." The Jewish police were instructed to announce that violators would be shot. In the meantime, a transport of Jews arrived from the surrounding villages and small towns, 200 in total. They were left on the main market place. Not even a drop of water was permitted them by the Ukrainian bandits. The annihilation of these Jewish communities was set to take place. Staszow was the town where my ancestors had lived for many years. I would know it no more.

*Oh man, and come
and walk the town of slaughter
the black dried blood
with brain and splintered bone
and plunge the soul in tears*

*Chaim Nachman Bialik
Hebrew Poet Laureate*

*(Further memoirs of Staszow to appear in the next edition of the
Ezras Israel Memorial Book.)*

ODE - IN MEMORY OF STASHOV

by Samuel Rosenberg

Saturday, November 7, 1942, was the day described as the Black Sabbath. People ran to relatives, friends and neighbors to bid goodbye. Weeping and wailing were heard from the houses. Electricity to the Ghetto was cut off. From 5:00 p.m. the town was cut off and guarded by German, Ukrainian and Polish police. At 10:00 p.m. *Obersturmfuhrer* (high ranking) Schild, in charge of the extermination in the Radom District, arrived. From the Judenrat, chaired by Efraim Singer, he demanded 10 kilos of butter, 10 kilos of pork, 10 kilos of rice, and 5 kilos of tea for his 150 men. He banged on the table and announced in the name of Himmler that, "The resettlement of Staszow Jews will take place tomorrow, Sunday, November 8, 1942 at 8:00 a.m." The Jewish police were instructed to announce that violators would be shot. In the meantime, a transport of Jews arrived from the surrounding villages and small towns, 200 in total. They were left on the main market place. Not even a drop of water was permitted them by the Ukrainian bandits. Then Singer was ordered to prepare a festive meal for the 150 *Strafcommando*. At 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, November 8 the Nazis took Singer into a private house, gagged and tortured him, and then shot him.

Many Jews escaped during the night: many had hiding places prepared in advance and a few sought refuge in Christian homes. My parents had left Staszow a few days earlier to hide in the forest. Later I found out they hid in a cave: it was hard to find food and the winter was coming. (My brother and I were very disturbed upon learning this news in a letter we received sometime later, at our camp in Mielec).

On Sunday, at 8:00 a.m., 5,000 Jews assembled on the market place and were ordered by Schild to start the march to Sczucin, a 50-mile journey by foot. The transport of our fathers, mothers, and infants held by their parents proceeded to Krakowski street.

The Nazis then started sporadically to shoot at the crowd with dum dum bullets. At noon 189 bodies were picked up. Many were already murdered in their homes. All were buried in a mass grave at the Jewish Cemetery.

Meir Moshe Yehiel donned his tallis and teffilin while waiting to die. Yehiel Mostiker was gravely ill in his bed; the murderers picked him up and dropped him from the second floor balcony. In a nearby village 9 km. from Staszow a mass grave was dug for 740 victims. Blind Herschel Volman came out from hiding and lamented aloud from the street from the Book of Lamentations, for several hours. The SS murderers didn't murder him, but a Lithuanian guard did. The transport was moving by foot to the Schucin railroad station, a distance of about 50 km. Just imagine how many Jews reached this destination and, finally, Treblinka.

A defiant old woman, Malka Chaveles, in her last words to her German murderers said, "Your defeat is near. We've had many that tried to destroy us, but they will be destroyed. Hitler's end is near."

The Jewish *Ordnungsdienst* (police) remained with their wives, but not their children. At nightfall, many came out from the places in which their Christian neighbors had hidden them. The Christians told them they were no longer welcome and some Jews begged the shop manager to let them stay. Two Poles, managers for the business of Goldfarb and Mendelsuses, informed the Polish police that Jews were hiding behind the shop in a bunker. The police found 26 Jews, who were taken from the bunker and shot at the cemetery.

Mendel Lifschitz, while repairing streets for the Amler company, recognized his wife, Reisel, son, Zacharia, (my best friend), and daughter, Feigah, being led past Krakowski street to the cemetery, where they were executed. Many had given their children to Christian families and paid a high price for their protection; after the transport left with the parents, the children were led out from their homes to be executed. Announcements and posters proclaimed the sale of Jewish property. Many came from neighboring villages to buy valuables and homes for pennies. The buyers of the Jewish property broke open walls, ripped up floors. With joy, they found many Jews in hiding places in attics and basements.

Some were in hiding for days without water. Those found were immediately executed.

It is worth mentioning that twenty people with money and valuables saved their lives in the basement of the town's railroad station. The Director, Maria Szczecinska, who lived in the station apartment had them hidden during the day in the basement and at night in her dwelling. When the Gestapo found out that Jews were hiding there, she walked the group in the dark of the night into the nearby forest and returned with them after several days had passed.

When the activities died down on November 14, a friend sneaked out at night from Amler with two bottles of water in his pockets to help his hidden family. His father opened a secret door and told him of the difficulties that they were going through. He told him that his mother was constantly coughing and that they feared that the Germans would hear her. She covered herself with quilts and blankets and suffocated.

Starting in December 1942, the Nazis stopped shooting the "illegal" Jews, proclaimed safe sanctuary in Sandomir and promised that Jews could remain there until the end of the war. Many came out from hiding, hoping the Germans would keep their promise. On January 8, 1943 the *Strafcommando* surrounded the ghetto in Sandomir, shooting at the crowd and leaving many dead on the market place frozen to the ground. The rest were transported to Treblinka. My parents and sister were in this transport.

A typical transport of Jews would arrive by rail after a trip of several hours, sometimes several days. There were no water or toilet facilities. One hundred or more were packed in each boxcar. When the trains arrived, the freight cars were detached from the train. German officers would announce that they are now in the transport camp to be later distributed to the various labor camps. For their own protection the Jews were to be "disinfected." Money and valuables were handed over. Women and children were separated from the men. The Ukrainians and Germans shouted and beat them into the "showers" filled with Zyklon B gas. All were dead inside within half an hour.

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The sewing workshop remained in Staszow after the deportation. In December 1942, the shop, machinery and a few hundred Jews were transported to Poniatow, near Lublin. They worked there for 10 months. When the Germans conducted a search in the camp and found weapons, they had all 300 executed. A great number were from Staszow.

The Amler Camp of 250 road construction workers remained in their quarters to remove the gravestones from the Jewish Cemetery. In March 1943, the camp was surrounded by the SS and ordered to pack their belongings. After several hours traveling they reached Skarzhisk — an arms factory known as Hasag Werk A. In Skarzhisk armed guards took them to an isolated place and searched and then ordered to hand over anything of value. As they lined up for roll call, the first 20 people were ordered to the side. One of them was my uncle, Leibisz Fefferman, age 52. He was the elected assistant to the town's mayor, Racinski, for many years. He was transported to do the hardest work at Werk C, where he died after a short period of time. Most of the laborers from the Staszow Amler camp were assigned to the *Banhouse Dept.* (Building Dept.), since there was a shortage of labor in this field.

In the summer of 1962, workers demolished an old house, formerly belonging to Naftali Kestenberg. It was located at Market Place and Church Street. He was the owner of the store of wholesale groceries. On deportation day some Poles found their hiding place in the attic and all went to the transport to Schucin. The workers found a black notebook written in Polish and Yiddish by Eva Kestenberg, born in 1923. I remember her as a talented, bright youngster. In her journal she philosophized on the illogic nature of war and hatred and asked what the purpose of killing millions of innocent children was. The notebook contains a poem in Polish of about twenty stanzas. She calls it the "Song of Disappointment in Humanity," and in it asks the Almighty to create a new person.

For the black bread that I devour with tears
For the silent hunger of my mother
For the cry of the murdered Jews
For the broken heart of my family
For the silent anger of my father

